

Testimony of First Year Cleveland
The Ohio Ways and Means Committee
May 23, 2023

Chair Roemer, Vice Chair Lorenz, and Members Troy, Brennan, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on behalf of First Year Cleveland. My name is Angela Newman-White, and I am First Year Cleveland's Executive Director.

Founded in 2015, First Year Cleveland was created in response to the record high infant mortality rate of 18.5 for black infants as compared to a rate of 5.5 for white infants. This public/private partnership supports communities, aligns programs, and advocates for fair and just policies that address racial inequities in birth and health outcomes.

First Year Cleveland's mission is to mobilize the community through partnerships and a unified strategy to reduce infant deaths and racial disparities to fulfill its vision that every baby born in Cuyahoga County will celebrate a first birthday. Our mission is supported through our four strategic priorities: 1) Reducing prematurity; 2) Addressing social drivers to poor health; 3) Dismantling racism in healthcare; and 4) Investing in communities.

On behalf of First Year Cleveland, I would like to express my support for HB 118, specifically the sales tax exemption for baby products. The leading risk factor for infant death and many other adverse outcomes in Cuyahoga County continues to be poverty. Economic challenges impact access to safe and quality housing, education, healthy food, transportation, healthcare, and vital baby products, all things needed to thrive.

With costs rising and wages remaining stagnant, it is difficult for families to survive and thrive. According to 2019 US Census Data, 35.2% of Cleveland residents live in poverty and the child child poverty rate is at 48.7%. Data collected through the Ohio Equity Institute's Cuyahoga County Navigation program, consistently reports the number one referral as "baby items". Many families are heavily dependent on donated items to support infant and parenting needs due to limited economic resources. Though there are organizations that provide some baby items at no cost, resources are very limited. Reducing the costs for vital baby products will be highly beneficial, especially for larger ticket items like car seats that are not traditionally available through community partners.

With your support, we can help to reduce financial stressors for growing families in Cuyahoga County and provide more opportunities for families and children to thrive.